

Celebrate the differences

You can motivate them. You can direct their energies. You can teach them, lead them, and guide them.

But, you can't really control them. You shouldn't try. You shouldn't even want to.

If you want to control employees, you have to watch them all the time. As soon as you're not looking, they may rebel and go back to doing things their way. That requires you to exercise "eternal vigilance"—which is a rotten way to spend the day and it keeps you from doing anything productive.

Don't control: coach for results, giving clear directions and defining the goal. Then, trust them.

When you evaluate their job performance and related workplace behaviors, put your perceptions to this test:

“Is what they’re doing wrong or is it just different from the way I’d do it?”

Too many supervisors manage by the “my way or the highway” standard. They view a different approach as a threat to their authority.

You can waste a lot of time and engender a lot of anger and resentment if you make people undo and redo things they did competently the first time.

Part of your job as manager/coach is to learn your workers’ individual work styles and allow them to do things their way whenever possible—as long as they get the results you want, when you want them.

The same goes when you’re called on to edit their written work. You must, of course, edit for clarity and accuracy. You should help them achieve concision. But, when it comes to idiom and voice—the way an individual “sounds” on paper—let them be them.

Let these three slogans guide you:

If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it: This sounds simple, but it’s worth keeping in the back of your mind when you’re tempted to do something untoward.

If it is broke, let them fix it: They’ll take ownership and be more motivated because of it.

If they can’t fix it, fix it with them: That’s an essential part of leadership and teamwork.

“You don’t want compliant slaves. You want effective, creative, and competent colleagues.”